DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 272 409 SO 017 319

AUTHOR Maxcy, Spencer J.
TITLE The Generation of Social Education Knowledge and the Problem of Relativism.
PUB DATE 16 Apr 86
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (67th, San Francisco, CA, April 16-20, 1986).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cognitive Structures; *Epistemology; Liberalism; *Marxian Analysis; *Metacognition; Naturalism; *Phenomenology; *Social Science Research

ABSTRACT

What is deemed to be socially relevant knowledge as it comes from social educational theorists and inquirers is not a singular conception. The prevailing notion that only pluralistic and relativist, or positivist epistemological concepts of truth adequately capture social education inquiry and products, and that claims to human action based on "soft" or "fuzzy" qualitatively-driven bases are illicit, is clearly wrong headed. What is required is a new view of conceptual schemes and frameworks that does not run the risk of either positivistic metaphysics or vicious relativism. It is argued that a meta-theory of social education inquiry that is neither absolutist nor foundational in the traditional meanings of these terms, together with an attendant conception of what is socially useful knowledge, is capable of being constructed and followed in practice. However, this new view must grow from more sophisticated assumptions regarding what counts as wisdom rather than knowledge, who ought to inquire, and which tools of the inquiry processes are most instrumental to the generation of such wisdom, as well as what ends are appropriate for social education. (BZ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED272409

THE GENERATION OF SOCIAL EDUCATION KNOWLEDGE AND THE PROBLEM OF RELATIVISM

by

Spencer J. Maxcy
Professor - Philosophy of Education
Dept. of Administrative & Foundational Services
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge

A Paper Presented Before
The American Educational Research Association
Research in Social Studies Education: SIG

San Francisco, CA
April 16, 1986

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
SPENCER J. MAXCY
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SP017319

THE GENERATION OF SOCIAL EDUCATION KNOWLEDGE AND THE PROBLEM OF RELATIVISM

By
Spencer J. Maxcy
Louisiana State University

Introduction

When we look at some of the more intriguing questions facing social education theorists, one of the most problematic centers on what constitutes the proper relationship between social education inquiry, knowledge production, and social education teaching. Is social education inquiry to be modeled on a single "positivistic" research model derived from the "hard sciences," or, is this inquiry a function of differing "conceptual schemes" or "frameworks," each relatively adequate to its parent "ideological" system? Is social education knowledge of one piece or are there rival epistemologies that are and can be generated from research programs in social education? How ought the social educator to deal with often confusing and contradictory "world views," or "conceptual schemes," that are linked to competing research schools of thought?

Social education research is currently caught in a peculiar act of self-contradiction: The fear of sleeping with the dog of positivism [with its fleas of naive empiricism], has propelled social education theorists and researchers into the lions' den of radical relativism. Here, according to a number of theorists, is a safe haven, with the only catch being we must accept a pluralistic world of alternative conceptual schemes and frameworks as the ultimate resolution points for research and

curricular controversy (Apple, 1979; Bourdieu, 1977; Giroux, 1981). The irony is that this theoretical relativist position has strong (but often hidden) ties with the very positivism it seeks to displace. What has been overlooked is the fundamental role that positivist accounts of theory play in supported conceptual frameworks thinking, in the characterization of socially relevant knowledge; in how pluralistic epistemological theory relates to the conceptual frames and educational research strategies; and, in the extent to which social education teaching, in particular, may be a function of competing conceptual frameworks.

What must be discovered and understood is the precise nature of conceptual frameworks relative to notions of socially useful knowledge as educational theorists may view these; and what these alternative epistemes or points of view bring to alternative views of social education method vis-a-vis curricular advocacy. The present effort will critique how some social educators have viewed the role of these alternative conceptual frameworks with respect to the charge that they represent either a rejection of positivism or an improvement on the traditional positivistic point of view. It is anticipated that a more fruitful set of fundamental assumptions are required that strips away the pseudo-rivalry of positivism vs. relativism in accounting for how social education research ought to procede to accomplish its ends, how the traditional ends of research are now open to question, and how this may all impact on social education teaching.

Competing Views

Liberalism, Marxist socialism, Critical Theory, and more recently "Naturalistic Inquiry," provide popular competing views relative to the question of what constitutes socially relevant knowledge as it is promoted by the school in general and social education curricular programs in particular. Radical socialists

argue that we normally ask "Whose knowledge is it that is being taught in the schools? Why is it organized in this way? Why is this knowledge taught to this particular group?" But we may probe deeper into matters with queries such as: "Why does this form of social group exist, how is it maintained, and, who benefits from it?" Apple (1979) penetrates in this way when he calls for the study of the interconnections between ideology and curriculum as well as educational argumentation. (p. 14) By focusing on ideological points of view and then working down to the curricular policies as played out in day-to-day classroom settings, we are emancipated from the ideological hegemony of past curricular theories. The essentially reproductive character of knowledge in schooling emerges from such an analysis. (Kickbusch & Everhart, 1985; Anyon, 1980, Larkin, 1979). The most adequate ideological focus is taken to be an economic model of education in which the key conceptual frames are capitalistic vs. socialistic, repressive and reproductive vs. emanicipatory. (Apple, 1979).

Critical Theory has been looked to as an improvement on Marxist analyses of schooling and social educational functions. Giroux (1983) points out that while there is hope that radical educators may begin to reconstruct and apply the insights of critical theory to schooling, there are a number of short-comings that critical theory has manifested. Critical theory has not developed a comprehensive theoretical approach for dealing with conflict and contradictions in culture; it has developed an unsatisfactory notion of domination and an exaggerated view of the integrated nature of the American public; it has underestimated the radical potential of the working class; and, it never developed an adequate theory of social consciousness. Critical theorists have been relatively successful in their critiques of positivism, their view of theory, their critical reconstruction of a theory of culture, and their analysis of depth psychology. (Girouz, 1983, 40-41) However, the real issue may be to graft the contributions of critical theory to new

historical conditions, without sacrificing the emancipatory spirit that generated them. Giroux argues that the social theorist ought to begin not with observation, but rather with a theoretical perspective or framework that sets the observation within a context of rules and conventions that give it meaning, while simultaneously acknowledging the limits of such a perspective or framework. Theory is therefore a mode of critique and analysis as well as of understanding. The tandem nature of theory and practice is stressed, but theory is never reduced to practice. Critical theory, as it would come to play in social educational theorizing, would see theory as a mode of criticism while functioning as a set of tools inextricably affected by the context in which it is brought to bear, but never reducible to that context. (Giroux, 20-21).

Another version of the ideological views position is that of the 'climate of opinion.' It is possible to focus on the historians' concept of 'climate of opinion' and then to argue that each age has certain preconceptions relative to what the world is like. This construct allows historians to talk about particular uses of intelligence or types of logic used to understand human action. (Popkewitz, 1984, 1-3) According to Popkewitiz (1984) when we look at research in American education we find that individualism has been the major theme. Drawn from the theories of Locke, contemporary researchers hold that the individual is an essentially receptive, reflective organism with qualities shaped over time by the environment. (pp. 3-4) Behavioral science methods, taxonomies of thought, management, notions of problem-solving, all are distillates of English political philosophy. (p. 4) The prevailing climate of opinion in the United States is one of rationally competing individuals and this is a consequence of Lockean liberalism.[1]

---

[1]Popkewitz incorrectly assumes that a cultural pluralism in the United States was bred or supported by epistemological relativism, while most theorists hold that cultural pluralism generated cultural relativism and epistemological relativism. Nor

It is possible to identify three conceptual frameworks that function as research postures in social education theory today. Popkewitz characterizes these as: (1) "empirical analytic,"(2) "symbolic," and (3) "critical sciences." The first approach seeks to make teaching strategies or curricular materials aid in reaching social studies objectives, stressing rigorous procedures and statistics. The second framework looks at school culture and seeks to display how students and teachers use language, role, values, and beliefs. The third research approach focuses on telling how institutional conditions create certain patterns of thought and reason, feelings, beliefs, notions of self and knowledge; and demonstrating how these relate to the larger social issues of culture, society and economics.[2] (Popkewitz, 1984, 7-8)

Feinberg and Soltis, (1985) identify three theoretical views of school and society: functionalist, Marxist and interpretivist, while readily admitting that the authors of the text do not agree on the relative adequacy of these competing rationales for research in education. Like Popkewitz, Feinberg and Soltis lay out three alternative schemes for inquiry, evaluate each, and propose that it is really up to the researcher which he/she adopts.

---

can we assume that cultural pluralism led to scientific methodological pluralism, as Popkewitz maintains. (Popkewitz, 1984, 5-6)

2 Popkewitz (1984) argues that previous social education theory has erred where it has sought to distinguish research practice by method alone. The qualitative- quantitative technique distinction is a case in point. The qualitative vs. quantitative distinction is a formal and technical dualism which ignores the social quality of science and denys that language of science contains value and interest. In addition, alternative research approaches reflect alternative disciplinary paradigms, with distinct values, beliefs, concepts, and technologies. Differences in research, Popkewitz argues, reflects different visions of the nature of society and schooling. (pp. 7-8)

Such tendencies in the literature on research methods are not unique historically, (see Mouly, et.al.), but the consequences for practice seem to be to either assume one of the strategies superior, while giving lip-service to the other approaches, or select one or two of the methods rather than the rest arguing that insufficient space disallows a fuller treatment of all strategies. It has even been argued that there are so many research methods, it is impossible to do them all justice, so why not teach the ones we are most familiar with and let the others remain a backdrop for later work. The injunction by teachers of research methodologies that a research method ought to fit the kinds of issues and problems, data and information, constraints of time and place, etc., is often mentioned, but not often followed in practice. The result is that what passes for method is often convenient and known skills modeled on other researchers techniques: if we teach like our teachers, it is equally true that we research like our teacher-researchers.

The Response and the Deeper Problem of Relativism

Beneath contemporary theorizing in social education research methodology is the fundamental assumption that alternative and competing conceptual frameworks are relative to the inquirers that propose them and the data they analyze. Contemporary social education theorists seem to be caught on the horns of a dilemma. If they propose that alternative theories of social education research method may exist, and that conceptual schemes are relative to the context or mind-set of those that propose them, then they are criticised for failing to provide a "scientific" account of social truth; on the other hand, if theorists posit a single conceptual scheme for social inquiry, they are criticised for being positivistic and not accounting for alternative means of arriving and socially constituted truth.

Popkewitz (1984) illustrates the relativist position where he states that there are three patterns of social education

research. Adopting a kind of sociology of knowledge point of view plus historical development of critical theory to adequately and accurately depict the situation of science relative to social life, Popkewitz believes that every educational research pattern must reflect the dominant interests and values of an historic era ("climate of opinion"), while competing research programs in a single historic period reflect factions or elements of the era.[3] Research relativism may be evaluated in terms of how well the particular paradigms fulfill the purposes they seek to achieve. Thus, the empirical model is taken to be good if it achieves administrative efficiency, the symbolic model is valuable if it achieves communication, and the critical theory view is worthy if it reveals political interests and attitudes.[4]

Liston (1985) argues for positivist checks when he states that we should be concerned about the direction and development of radical theories of education. Radical analysis has moved too quickly, he points out, shifting from concern over the issue of class to gender, race and now age. There has been insufficient

---

[3] Popkewitz's view can be characterized as a radical theoretical relativism.

[4] The anthropological version of the sociology of knowledge position finds culture to be the unit of epistemological relativism. However, it is possible to subscribe to an ideal relativism while embracing the actual relativity of cultural units. Popkewitz and other theoretical relativists have accepted the relativity of conceptual schemes, positing an ideal relativism toward which researchers are to strive; one in which the competing models do discrete things, are evaluated independently of one another, etc. Whereas current research relativism is loose and ill-defined, it is possible to envision a crisp and clean relativity in which inquirers go about separate, but legitimate tasks. The problem emerges in accounting for cross-fertilization and contradictions in competing educational research strategies and schemes, as well as evaluation, relatively speaking of similar products (socially sanctioned knowledge). Perhaps more problematic, how does Popkewitz justify the mode of analysis and depiction of research results used in his study of the three conceptual schemes used in educational research without taking a foundational, meta-scheme position?

empirical research testing of Marxist claims relative to schooling and social class, Liston argues. He writes: "If 'radical theories' of schooling are concerned with the truth of their statements, empirical assessments of the theoretical claims must be made, and this requires coherent, conceptually consistent, nonparadoxical, and indeed, limited theoretical frameworks." (Liston, 1985, p. 312) Moreover, studies of public schooling and education will progress better when researchers revisit the traditons from which they borrow and keep a "keen eye on the empirical scheme." (p. 312)

Wuthnow, et.al. (1984) run into the positivism trap when, after reviewing the cultural research strategies of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jurgen Habermas, they lament as to whether it is possible to construct cultural analysis on a basis capable of producing verifiable social scientific knowledge at all; or whether the study of culture necessarily remains a speculative venture. (Wuthnow, et.al., 1984, p. 257) If we adopt a hermeneutic solution, the authors assert, then the meanings may be enriched, but a true cultural science can only derive from empirical generalizations. To admit this is to push cultural science to be a function of positivist assumptions. Hence, the picture is not very appealing.

Is there any solution to this dilemma? Must the social education researcher become impaled?

Where social education theorists accept the epistemological aims of research, they run the risk of either relativism or the lures of positivist rationales for a fresh empirical approach. The clue to unmasking this confusion may reside in the notions of "conceptual scheme," "climate of opinion," etc. Donald Davidson (1984) characterizes the relativist epistemological position with respect to conceptual schemes in the following way: "Conceptual schemes, we are told, are ways of organizing experience; they are systems of categories that give form to the data of sensation; they are points of view from which individual cultures, or periods survey the passing scene. There may be no translating

from one scheme to another, in which case the beliefs, desires, hopes, and bits of knowledge that characterize one person have no true counterparts for the subscriber to another scheme. Reality itself is relative to scheme: what counts as real in one system may not in another." (1984, p. 184)

There are numerous difficulties with conceptual scheme relativism. One of these is a paradox. This is to say that different conceptual schemes only make sense if there is some common co-ordinate system on which to plot them, however, the existence of such a system flies in the face of the claim of incompatibility or uniqueness of schemes. (Davidson, 1984, p. 184) The question then emerges: If we assumed that having a conceptual scheme or frame of reference is equivalent to having a language, then is it possible to show the uniqueness of language such that there may arise no cases in which one can translate from one language to another? Davidson, for one, argues that we cannot make sense of this total failure to translate, but partial failure is possible to demonstrate. (Davidson, 1984, pp. 184-185)

When we look at competing conceptual schemes in social education, then it is proper to ask if it is totally impossible to translate from one scheme to another. On the face of it, the answer would appear to be no. This is to say that the notion of 'social class,' for example, can be translated between Marxist and non-Marxist schemes without severe damage to the integrity of the notion. In fact, it is surprising how much alternative conceptual schemes rely on each other for key concepts. However, there is more at stake than linguistic compatability, for what Davidson omits is the wider range of personal and social behaviors that are not reducible to linguistic specification. Thus, while Davidson may be adequate for understanding typical positivistic science, he is not adequate for understanding social science and social education. For, social education theory relies on more than molecular weights and scales of hardness. Social education deals with human states-of-affairs not easily understood by natural science notions.

Apel (1972; 1980) finds a solution to contemporary problems in the social sciences to emerge from the creation of a critical social science focusing on the development of a genuine transcendental dialectial conception of social science with a universal "communication community." He writes:

> ...this transcendental presupposition of science is neither idealistic in the sense of traditional philosophies of consciousness nor materialistic in the sense of an ontological official 'dialectical materialism' or a scientistic, positivistic objectivism that conceals its ontological implications. (Apel, p. 140)

Apel argues that this dialectical mediation is found in the inalienable normative and ideal assumption of the transcendental language game of an unlimited communication community. Moreover, this assumption of linguistic community is assumed in the very use of a single human word (or intellibile related action). The social subject of social science then becomes at once potentially open to scientific truth consensus, as well as an historical-real social subject. The subject of study is both normative and descriptive --- open to reconstructed meaning in the light of the ideal of the unlimited communication community that is to be realized in the society. (Apel, p. 140)

This transcendental-philosophical point of view confronts the traditional dualism between subject and object in science. The problem is that in the social sciences, man comes to study man; and the problem of subjectivism becomes more serious than in physics where the object of inquiry is non-human. Apel finds in the distinction between 'explanation' and 'understanding' the key to justifying his transcendental argument for a communication community. (Apel, pp. 141-147) By rejecting "scientism" (i.e. positivism in standard empiricism format) in favor of a "transcendental hermeneutics," Apel moves beyond Gadamer by proposing,

> ...the goal of unlimited communication---and this means that of the abolition of all obstacles to communication---also includes the legitimation to temporarily suspend hermeneutic commications with the interpretandum in order to turn instead to causal or functional 'explanations' of the empirical-analytical social science. (Apel, p. 125)

In this way, hermeneutic methods are extended and come to be used in the form of a critique of ideology and within this frame-of-reference, the methods of transcendental hermeneutics are acceptable if they do not degenerate into an end in themselves. Rather, what is required for social science inquiry is a method that produces explanations which are considered to be capable of conversion into reflexively heightened self-understanding of the communicating parties. (Apel, pp. 124-127) Additionally, Apel would have social science research take seriously the pragmatic notion of explication in terms of potential real praxis and its correlated experience. Thus, Apel combines a Kantian concern for a transcendental presuppositions regarding the conduct of science (in the present instance, social science) with a rejection of this transcendental feature as "consciousness as such," and substitution for the concept of language community. Like Rorty (1979) Apel parts company with Descartes and others who sought to use the evidence of consciousness to mirror nature. (Apel, p. 136-137)

Apel writes of the goal of a hermeneutically enlightened social science resting on the critique of ideology via critiques of whole forms of life and their official language games:

> This task requires, in my view, sailing between the Scylla of a relativistic hermeneutics, which sacrifices its own conditions for its possibility to the pluralism of language-game monads, and the Charybdis of a dogmatic-objectivistic critique that no longer admits of any

> real discourse. Indeed I believe...that this goal of philosophy and the critical social sciences can be achieved in the long run only along with the practical realization of social systems of self-assertion. (Apel, p. 172)

But, Apel's solution suffers from all of the problems of an Hegelian absolute idealist vision which the added value of pragmatic praxis fails to relieve. Neither Davidson's linguistic relativism nor Apel's linguistic monism accounts for all of conceptual scheme relativity. More is required. The difficulty may well lie in the emphasis placed upon language as reflective of epistemology in Davidson's account and the possibility of a universal linguistic community of social science in Apel's scheme.

There is at the present time a revolution going on in philosophy of science and educational research methodology may well follow suit. Growing out of the work of Rorty (1979) it is being argued that at least since the 17th century, philosophical discussion has sought a representational view of the universe, in which the human mind is taken to be a mirror reflecting reality; while knowledge is taken to be concerned with depicting this reality; and the role of philosophy has been to repair and polish this mirror. However, it is time for a shift and Rorty proposes a more "edifying" role of philosophy ala' Dewey, Wittgenstein and Heidegger. For Rorty, the fundamental role of language as informing some correspondance theory of truth is wrongheaded.

In a sense, the question of what means are most appropriate for the generation of social education knowledge is an exercise in question begging. For, the goal of securing 'knowledge,' as the most worthwhile end for social inquiry is a limited vision. So long as one is searching for cognitive and epistemological ends, the larger search for wisdom goes by the boards. Nicholas Maxwell (1984) argues that a radical transformation in the aims and methods of science is on the horizon. Whereas historically, science has had as its' dominant aim the acquisition and

extension of knowledge; a new kind of inquiry is required that has as its fundamental aim the enhancement of wisdom. Maxwell attempts to develop a "philosophy of wisdom" to replace the traditional "philosophy of knowledge." He writes:

> During the twentieth century mankind has made extraordinary progress in scientific knowledge, and in technological and industrial development. During the same period, mankind has committed horrifying crimes against itself, in that millions upon millions of people have suffered and died as a result of war, tyranny, concentration camps, mass executions, economic exploitation and increasingly unjust distribution of the world's resources. A major reason for this glaring discrepancy between what has been achieved in knowledge and in life is that during the last two or three centuries---and especially during the twentieth century in the developed world---mankind has succeeded only in developing socially influential organized inquiry in accordance with the philosophy of knowledge, and has thus failed to develop organized inquiry in accordance with the philosophy of wisdom. As a result, specialized knowledge has flourished, but social wisdom in the world has faltered. If we are to progress towards a wiser world it is essential that science, technology, scholarship and education in schools, universities and research establishments throughout the world be transformed to accord with the edicts of the philosophy of wisdom. If organized inquiry is developed in this way, then we may reasonably hope to make gradual progress towards a more just, humane, cooperative---and even loving---world... (Maxwell, 152)

Certainly, as soon as alternatives to the philosophy of the <u>status quo</u> are set forth in the form of radical proposals as to what the basic aims and methods of inquiry ought to be, such proposals are met with stiff resistance from entrenched research

ideologues. This is owing to the fact that research enterprises are invariably logically interwoven with the social institutions that maintain them. Academic careers, prizes and degrees, publications, etc., all revolve around and set the agenda for inquiry. Where change is advocated in the aims and methods of educational research (e.g. a new set of standards whereby to judge such inquiry) changes in institutional structure and rewards will follow. This is often too much to accept, and fierce resistence is encountered. (Maxwell, 153)

While institutional change is difficult to muster, personal change is equally troublesome. When social scientists have developed research habits along certain lines, resistence is likely to new habits and attitudes. We have seen how liberal and radical social educators have come to accept certain aspects in inquiry in an uncritical way, while proposing new critiques of the products of alternative inquiries. The fundamental assumptions underwriting their own views are submerged in the process.

The philosophy of knowledge paradigm that dominates research today is fraught with difficulties. First, this view, which may be called "standard empiricism," argues that only empirically testable states-of-affairs are grist for scientific enterprise. And for certain positivitically oriented radicals and critical theoriests, the ultimate test of non-empirical theory-bases. However, the argument of standard empiricism is <u>not</u> itself open to such test. Moreover, criticisms of standard empiricism are discounted by advocates as they control the flow of ideas subsumed under the assumptions of standard empiricism itself (Maxwell, 154).

By setting the philosophy of knowledge vis-a-vis the philosophy of wisdom, the inquiry is shifted to a fundamental concern for what the aims and methods of social research ought to be, and how these are to be related to the aims and methods of life itself. (Maxwell, 155) For Maxwell, the pitfall comes where the methods of science are applied (in both liberal and radical

characterizations) to social science problems, rather than problems of living. Rational method is applied to social science rather than social life; with the result that social science progress is mistakenly taken to be progress in social life itself. Ravitch (1983) catalogues the success of social science in influencing the judicial decisions relative to racial discrimination in education from the 1930's to the 1960's. By supporting a 'color-blind' model for eliminating racial discrimination in schooling, social scientists justified desegration on the grounds that one-race schools did positive harm to black youth. While early in the history of desegration, social scientists agreed on the impacts of segregation upon minority children, by the 1970's and 1980's such consensus eroded. It is currently debatable whether such social harm is generated by segregated educational institutions. The conclusion is that social science has functioned to inform social policy, but thoroughly misdirected judicial and legislative action, with the real consequence that rather than desegregating schools, educational institutions have become more single-race than ever! (Ravitch, 114-181) Current social science theory points to economics as a prior condition for social inequality, but social scientists (and some social education theorists) are unlikely to see this as equally fraught with danger as it functions as the inclusive explanatory concept.

A shift is required from viewing the fundamental aim of educational research as a growth in knowledge, to the view that the aim of educational inquiry ought to be the growth of value-in-life in general. Rather than an "aim-ordered empiricism" we need an "aim-ordered rationalism." Hence, instead of shying away from reason, the philosophy of wisdom directs it at the larger concerns of the good life, or the life worth living. It is anticipated that the fruits of social science research can be a progressively more valued life; rather than improving knowledge for knowledge sake, we may become more edified relative to the life-value. (Maxwell, 156-157) Rorty

(1979) speaks most conclusively on this function of philosophic inquiry as edification rather than empirical justification.

Given this view, social inquiry in social education ought to shift from a concern to develop a "social science," to developing social inquiry as social methodology. It would seem that social education classrooms are open to this sort of re-direction. Whereas in social science research, only a few elite cadres of social scientists are involved, in social education inquiry, the vast number of teachers and students are involved. The clique of experts, producing expert knowledge, is so small compared to the students and teachers in the social education classroom, we cannot expect the former to come to grips with social problems. Social engineering must be replaced with socially motivated inquiry. Conceiving of the world as subject to experimentation misses the important difference between laboratory science where consequences of unsound theory are merely dismissed and new theories substituted, versus the realm of social life, where problem-fraught theories may have enormous social costs in the form of missed opportunities, economic misfortunes, etc. Scientific failure differs from social failure. As Maxwell states it:

> In short, we cannot reasonably expect to be able to learn from our mistakes in life in anything like the rapid, progressive way in which we learn form mistakes in science and technology---partly because in life we cannot hire clever experts to do our thinking for us, partly because in life we cannot deliberately and painlessly make lots of mistakes from which to learn, and partly because in life mistakes are often difficult to detect and agree about. (Maxwell, 159)

In the area of education it may be asked: How may we "...develop education for everybody...discovering how to put into practice and develop progress-achieveing methodologies in life,

in diverse personal and inter-personal pursuits, so that we may realize what is of value to us [?]" (Maxwell, 159)

Certainly, there are barriers to the replacement of a philosophy of knowledge with that of a philosophy of wisdom, not the least of which is the ideological capitivity of research in social education, and the continuous battle for control over (read 'hegemony') socially construed epistemic products. However, the penchant for positivistic attitudes on the one hand, and relativistic reductions on the other, cast social education inquiry and social education curriculum free when viewed from a philosophy of wisdom position.

Two further clues present themselve regarding how a new, more adequate view of social education research methodology ought to be generated. If we are to find a more fruitful way of dealing with the one and the many, the absolutism of positivism and the pluralism of research relativism, then an historic inquiry into how social education research programs have emerged and faltered would provide us with models for testing the adequacy of current conceptions. The study of the indoctrination controversy in social education that florished in the 1930's and continues to dominate the literature, is an example. The history of research practices is not singular, but much can be learned from using historic method to uncover characteristics of social education research method.

A second clue is to be found in re-casting the community of inquirers that may comprise the new social education research thrust. Rather than an elite of research scientists, this community (which shall set agendae, determined researchable questions, and in other ways control the focus and direction of social education research). should include teachers, students, administrators, university faculty and parents. In this way, those who have the most at-risk would provide direction. Certainly John Goodlad's projects in Arkansas and elsewhere are examples of this new notion of the community of inquirers in action. If schools are to be reformed, a cooperative effort is

required that respects all those groups affected, seeing them as knowledge producers for the purposes of structured change. (Goodlad, 1984)

An Analogue

The field of educational administration theory provides a useful analog for our purposes. Positivistic and relativistic research hegemony have plagued theorists here as well. Lakomski (1984) offers a way out of the problem of epistemological relativism in research in educational administration by offering a "non-foundationalist...materialist-pragmatic epistemology." She writes:

> The non-foundationalist epistemology defended here can happily accept the charge of circularity and, equally happily, deny the verdict of "guilty." Unlike its rivals, it recognizes equivalence between the principles of assessment of knowledge claims and the claims themselves accepting as its smallest units whole theories. (Lakomski, 1984, p. 17)

This view does not accept a priori what is to matter as knowledge. It accepts any theories which may be fruitful for solving particular administrative problems. The emphasis is placed on open-ended, continuous inquiry plus a "coherence theory of evidence" (or that theory is true which provides internally coherent evidence for explaining phenomena and has simplicity, elegance, explanatory power and comprehensiveness).[5] (Lakomski, p. 17) She further argues that scientific inquiry is not neutral and that therefore "...all theorizing can be described as valuing, and that theories are then systematically and coherently

[5]Lakomski (1984) admits that there are other qualifications that must be met as well.

'worked up' values." (Lakomski, p. 17) These value-laden theories are then subjected to a rational decision-making model which she specifies. Epistemologically, this approach is materialistic, while focusing on the relationships between social phenomena. (Lakomski, pp. 18-19) Finally, her position is pragmatic in the sense that it attends to simple phenomenal process (and somewhat expedient in the fact that scientific theories have no priviledged status relative to commonsense ones).(p. 19)

Lakomski argues that the scientific nature of education administration rests on how educational administration deals with methods of inquiry vis-a-vis particular subject matters. Educational administration is seen as a set of educational practices and processes, which form the subject matter or data and provide the problems of inquiry as well as the final evaluations of educational changes. Given Lakomski's view, other sciences and data-bases cannot help.

There are strong and weak points in Lakomski's position. Her view of the value-ladenness of theories is accurate. The call for materialist emphasis plus pragmatic concern for phenomenal process is worthy. However, when we look more closely at her efforts to reject a foundational basis for her position, we find her embracing a vicious epistemological relativism; one which allows her to posit a theory of educational administration research that denys the category of 'administration' subject matter in favor of 'educational practices.' She then proposes that practices "form" the problems to be inquired into, and the evaluations of these matters. A closed system results in which one cannot discern good research from bad owing to the parallel research programs never possessing the potential for cross-fertilization and evaluation. It is a theory of method that yields a science of educational administration research, while allowing for a relative diversity of research theories and methods, so long as these do not borrow from other fields of study (i.e. psychology, economics, etc.). (Lakomski, pp. 20-21)

Unfortunately, the current state of the art relative to educational administration research is that it draws and has drawn heavily from political science, economics, and other disciplines; but, more importantly, derivative fields like public administration are feeding a constant stream of theories and data-bases into educational administration. Thus, while Lakomski's model is non-foundational, it is narrowly relativistic bordering on research ethnocentrism in an era of intense borrowing from wider disciplines and fields.

When we attempt to develop a model for social education research based on Lakomski's views, key problems emerge. Whereas, it may be argued that social education theory is value-laden in precisely the same sense as that of educational administration, we find the multiple theories view resting on internal criteria for adequacy to be suspicious. For, this is presently the problem the multiple research "conceptual schemes" in social education inquiry fall heir to. Furthermore, Lakomski's model is at once absolutistic, in a Popperian sense, while embracing a theoretical relativism.

Maxwell too, comes dangerously close to positivism when he advocates taking the fruitful methods of the empirical sciences into the social science arena. Hence, it is easy, in the attempt to avoid the doctrinaire and ideological view of empiricism, to construct an equally doctrinaire research theory based on the methods of positivistic science plus a relativist account of theories. This is strikingly deceptive, and may in the final analysis lure us away from an edifying philosophy of wisdom as a starting place for social education inquiry.

Conclusions

The point is simply this: What we deem socially relevant knowledge as it comes from social educational theorists and inquirers is not a singular conception. The prevailing notion that only pluralistic and relativist, or positivist

epistemological conceptions of truth adequately capture social education inquiry and products, and that claims to human action based on "soft" or "fuzzy" qualitatively-driven bases are illict, is clearly wrongheaded. What is required is a new view of conceptual schemes and frameworks that does not run the risk of either postivistic methaphysics or vicious relativism. It is argued here a meta-theory of social education inquiry, that is neither absolutist or foundational in traditional meanings of these terms, and an attendent conception of what is socially useful knowledge, is capable of being constructed and followed in practice. However this new view must grow from more sophisticated assumptions regarding what counts as wisdom rather than knowledge, who ought to inquire, which tools of the inquiry processes are most instrumental to the generation of such wisdom, as well as what ends are appropriate for social education. In the preceding pages an effort has been made to argue for the first steps toward such a view, one that would unlock the grip and lure of polaristic thinking so prevalent today.

Sources

Anyon, J. (1980). "Social class and the hidden curriculum at work," Journal of Education. 162, pp. 67-92.

Apel, K. (1972; 1980) Towards a transformation of philosophy. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Apple, M. (1979). Ideology and curriculum. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Barrow, R. (1984). Giving teaching back to teachers. Brighton, Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books.

Berger, P.L. (1974). Pyramids of sacrifice. Garden City, New

Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J. (1977). Reproduction in education, culture, and society. Beverley Hills, California: Sage.

Bredo, E. & Feinberg, W. (eds.). (1982). Knowledge and value in soical and educational research. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Goodlad, J. (1984). A place called school. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Davidson, D. (1984). Inquiries into truth and interpretation. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Devitt, M. (1984). Realism and truth. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Feinberg, W. & Soltis, J.F. (1985). School and society. New York: Teachers College Press.

Giroux, H.A. (1981). Ideology, culture, and the process of schooling. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Giroux, H.A. (1983). Theory and resistence in education: A pedagogy for the opposition. Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey.

Goodman, N. (1978). Ways of worldmaking. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co.

Kickbusch, K.W & Everhart, R.B. (1985). "Curriculum, practical ideology, and class contradiction." Curriculum Inquiry, 15, 3, pp. 281-317.

Lakomski, G. (1984). "Theory, value and relevance in educational administration." (unpublished ms.)

Larkin, R. (1979). Suburban youth in cultural crisis. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lasch, C. (1984). The minimal self. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Maxwell, N. (1984). From knowledge to wisdom. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Petrie, H.G. (1972). "Theories are tested by observing the facts: or are they? In Thomas, L.G. (ed.). Philosophical redirections of educational research: The seventy-first yearbook of the national society for the study of education. Chicago: University of Chicago Press/ NSSE, pp. 47-73.

Popkewitz, T. (1984). Paradigms and Purpose. (unpublished ms.).

Putnam, H. (1981). Reason, truth and history. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ravitch, D. (1983). The troubled crusade. New York: Basic Books.

Rorty, R. (1979) Philosophy and the mirror of nature. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Wuthnow, R., Hunter, J.D., Bergesen, A., Kurwell, E. (1984). Cultural analysis: The work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jurgen Habermas. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.